

**Name of Event:** WHCOA FOCUS GROUP MEETING

**Date of Event:** January 11, 2005

**Location of Event:** Mayor's Conference Room, Honolulu Hale  
550 South King Street, 3<sup>rd</sup> Floor  
Honolulu, Hawaii 96813

**Number of Persons Attending:** 16

**Sponsoring Organization:** Planning/Education/Advocacy Sub-Committee (PEAS) of the Honolulu Committee on Aging (HCOA) and the Elderly Affairs Division (EAD), City and County of Honolulu, Department of Community Services (DCS)

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The group found many of their concerns overlapped the general issue areas currently under consideration by the Policy Committee. Therefore it was difficult to "pigeon hole" these concerns into one or another category. We chose to indicate multiple issue areas if that seemed more appropriate for our concerns.

**Priority Issue #1: Issues: Planning along the Lifespan and Health and Long Term Living: Health Promotion/Education** - People who stay active, healthy and informed usually require less intensive service provision as they age.

**Barriers:** Flat/reduced funding for these programs has led to an emphasis on service provision to older, frailer seniors rather than promoting and maintaining healthy lifestyles. Lack of information on the financial impact of home health and institutional care as compared to health promotion/education.

**Proposed Solution(s):** Increase funding. Facilitate data collection and dissemination on relative costs/number of people served using the same amount of funding. This activity should be primary. Existing programs on exercise, education and nutrition should be sustained and/or expanded whenever possible.

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**Priority Issue #2: Issues: Planning along the Lifespan and Our Community and Health and Long Term Living: Family Caregiving** - Family members are the largest providers of care, saving the health care system and taxpayers untold hundreds of millions of dollars annually. Most caregivers are either older spouses or baby boomers. Most boomers must continue to work and provide for their own children as they care for their aging parent(s) or other relatives. More often than not, their lives and finances are negatively affected by their caregiving activities. These affects include: reduction in work hours; quitting jobs that are not “caregiver friendly”; reduction or loss of income, retirement and health benefits; stress on the caregiver and their family members; neglect of their own health and personal needs.

**Barriers:** Lack of funding. Lack of information on the negative effects of caregiving. Lack of “caregiver friendly” employment and tax practices. Lack of home and community based care service providers.

**Proposed Solution(s):** Increase funding for the National Family Caregiver Support Program. Acquire needed information on national as well as local levels. Develop financial assistance for caregivers such as: changes in tax law, creating new tax credits, changing tax policies. Increase number of agencies providing home and community based care. Increase availability of extended hours for day care and overnight/weekend respite.

**Priority Issue #3: Issue: Workplace of the Future: Workforce/Community Development** – There is a severe shortage of qualified nurses at all levels, certified nurses aides and home health workers. Those doing the most difficult caregiving tasks are often the least trained, least paid and worst treated. This shortage will soon become a crisis as the number of seniors needing care increases over the next 20 years at the same time as our overall workforce shrinks. How can we create a system that attracts and prepares those who are interested and qualified to work in the home health industry?

**Barriers:** Fragmented and non-standard training; low pay; difficult working conditions.

**Proposed Solution(s):** Collaboration between aging network, government, education and workforce development agencies on a common goal resulting in an increase in the qualified healthcare workforce. Develop standard training and certification programs. Guarantee a living wage for those who meet these standards. Provide funding in the form of demonstration grants and seed money. Coordinate existing resources such as: welfare recipients who are now required to work in order to qualify for benefits; retirees; purposeful volunteers; well elders. Develop a volunteer bank/co-op concept. Create interest in volunteering for the elderly.

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**Priority Issue #4: Issues: Our Community and Health and Long Term Living: Affordable Supportive Services, including Housing** – These issues are different depending on the economic condition of the elder. Those who are low-income or in the gap group find themselves faced with making choices between housing, food, utilities and/or medicine. Supportive services that would allow them to maintain themselves in the environment of their choice are restricted to the very poor through Medicaid-like programs, limited in funding, or are costly so they cannot afford to pay for them on their own. Those who are more affluent are often on fixed or limited incomes, and may be asset rich and cash poor. Both face similar problems as they must deal with the increasing costs for food, utilities, health care, prescription medicines and rent or property taxes. Affordable, timely and easy to use transportation to maintain independence and reduce isolation is a perennial problem. Homelessness among the elderly is increasing. There is also a marked increase in the abuse and exploitation of the elderly.

**Barriers:** Lack of funding. Lack of affordable, decent, safe housing with supportive services. Rapidly increasing property values leading to the lack of affordable rentals and increases in property taxes for elders who own homes. Reduction in Section 8 assistance leading to the reduction in number of elders provided with rental assistance. Lack of accessible and affordable transportation options. Increase in number of elders, who are especially vulnerable, among the homeless. Lack of policies that promote development of “elder friendly” communities. Lack of a way to effectively communicate the risk of abuse and exploitation to seniors.

**Proposed Solution(s):** Increase Section 8 assistance for seniors. Increase funding for building of affordable multi-housing rental units. Create tax policies favoring the provision of supportive services in existing and new affordable rentals. Create development policies that promote “elder friendly” communities. Increase funding of accessible transportation. Develop “gate keeper” policies and programs that allow individuals and agencies to intervene on the seniors’ behalf in situations involving abuse and exploitation.

**Priority Issue #5: Issues: Planning along the Lifespan and Health and Long Term Living: Medicare/Long Term Care** - A national topic: How will we pay for it? Rapidly escalating costs, often resulting from expensive new technology, does not necessarily result in better care. Death with Dignity – polls indicate this is a choice people want, but we cannot agree on how to make it work. National (Universal) Health Insurance Program - We look at aging as crisis management, a micro view, rather than the macro view. Institutionalization should be the last resort – so how do we delay or prevent it?

**Barriers:** Lack of funding. Focus on extending life (quantity) rather than the quality of the life lived. Lack of education on specific issues, such as Death with Dignity, and the actual results in the states that have enacted such legislation.

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**Proposed Solution(s):** Public education on the issues. Increase health promotion to reduce future costs. Change from a one size fits all view to one where we agree to disagree, realizing there are many approaches to the same problem that work depending on the individual. Infuse gerontology into everything – the image of the elderly should have more to do with positive aging than chronology.

**Priority Issue #6: Issue: Planning along the Lifespan: Social Security** – We are being told the system will be bankrupt in the future so Social Security Reform is coming whether we like it or not. But how can we live with the proposed changes? Borrowing to fund the current liability will not really result in added security to the beneficiaries. Social Security is not just for those 62 and older – it supports the disabled as well as minor children after the death of a parent. What will happen to those beneficiaries under the proposed changes?

**Barriers:** Short sighted choices in the past that have resulted in the potential for the system to be bankrupt in the future. Lack of information on the actual status of the trust fund prevents the public as well as legislators from making informed choices.

**Proposed Solution(s):** No Privatization of Social Security. Honestly educate everyone about the problems through information dissemination. Take the time to develop an array of alternative solutions. Provide investment education targeted to different age groups, especially the upcoming elderly. Provide incentives as well as educational information on sound investment planning, especially for those under 40.

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